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Teaser

[image]

Blood tarnishes the yellowing grass,

Reeds quiver unbridled in the crazed wind,

Seemingly sensing the dark secrets of kin.

Warning

Warning: Dark themes.

Allegiances

WINDCLAN

LEADER Sedgestar - A long-furred pale brown tabby tom-cat with sage green eyes.

DEPUTY Whitefoot - A dark grey tabby she-cat with white paws and yellow eyes.

MEDICINE CATS Nuthatchface - A pale grey tabby she-cat with green eyes and a short tail. (Apprentice, Brindlepaw - A long furred tortoiseshell she-cat with amber eyes.)

WARRIORS Cypressdust - A brown tabby tom with hazel eyes.

Greyfeather - A small grey she-cat with a darker overcoat and green eyes.

Sycamorelight - A tan tabby tom with blue eyes.

Nightfern - A black long-furred tom with green eyes. (Apprentice, Burnetpaw - A lean ginger tabby she-cat with golden eyes.)

Redclaw - A dark ginger tabby she-cat with yellow eyes and a missing ear.

Emberheart - A lithe pale ginger tabby tom with green eyes.

Sunstreak - A burly golden tabby she-cat with light orange eyes. (Apprentice, Foxpaw - A russet tabby she-cat with large green eyes.)

Crowstorm - A scarred black tom with a white muzzle and amber eyes.

Waspsong - A pale ginger tabby she-cat with small ears and amber eyes.

Batwing - A dark brown tom with dark amber eyes.

Myrtleleap - A grey tabby she-cat with light yellow eyes.

Featherpool - A grey mottled tom with milky green eyes. (Apprentice, Volepaw - A dark brown tabby tom with light yellow eyes.)

QUEENS Goosepounce - A large light grey tabby cat with yellow eyes. (parent to Shadekit and Dovekit.)

ELDERS Olivetuft - A tortoiseshell she-cat with hazel eyes.

Tallears - A pale ginger tabby tom with big ears.

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RIVERCLAN

LEADER Kestrelstar - A brown tabby tom with heterochromatic green and blue eyes.

DEPUTY Orchidbird - A thin white tom with ginger tabby patches and amber eyes.

MEDICINE CATS Daffodilnest - A golden tabby tom with green eyes. (Apprentice, Ivypaw - A tan and white tom with yellow eyes.)

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THUNDERCLAN

LEADER Eveningstar - A black tuxedo she-cat with amber eyes.

DEPUTY Wolfpelt - A grey mottled tom with yellow eyes.

MEDICINE CAT Deerheart - A ginger and brown she-cat.

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SHADOWCLAN

LEADER Salamanderstar - A dark red she-cat with brown eyes.

DEPUTY Lavenderfern - A pale grey tabby tom.

MEDICINE CATS Plumshine - A dark blue-grey tabby tom.

Boarsnout - A brown and white tabby tom with a darker muzzle.

Prologue

The sun shone through the dark green leaves of the trees above, bathing two ambling cats in bright light. They walked side by side, their pelts brushing together. Both were from RiverClan, however, they were far from their territory. Poppymask and her mate, Furzegaze, were following the scents of their close friends; Vultureskip and Sweetblossom, who had announced that they were going on a walk and promised they would be be back.

They had yet to return.

It had been hours, and her Clanmates had started to wonder if they had left forever. Poppymask and Furzegaze had offered to search for them. There was a dreadful, twisted feeling Poppymask's stomach. She thought—She *knew* that Vultureskip and Sweetblossom would never leave RiverClan and their three kits unless they absolutely had to.

Furzegaze and Poppymask had followed the scents into the Twolegplace close to the Horseplace. The tabby molly felt unwell. Something was very wrong. Her mate and her shared an apprehensive glance before they both silently agreed that they would follow the scent of Vultureskip and Sweetblossom deep into the Twolegplace.

At the sound of twolegs loudly talking nonsense, Poppymask's fur fluffed up, and the duo darted away to avoid being spotted.

It took the two a bit to reach where the trail ended; close to WindClan's border. The metallic, sharp smell of blood mingled with her Clanmates' scents, which became heavy with fear. A WindClan cat's stench was fresh as well, but Poppymask deduced that it was from a cat who went on a walk or a patrol near the Twolegplace. The old molly stopped and signaled with her tail for Furzegaze to halt. From the concerned look on his face, Poppymask knew that the tom had gotten a whiff of the blood too. She inspected the grass and saw that slick blood coated the blades.

"We should go back and get Kestrelstar."

"I wouldn't trust that young'un with my prey, and definitely not with something as serious as this." Furzegaze's gravelly voice was solemn.

"I know you think he's too inexperienced to be leader, but he's our leader nevertheless. He could deal with this better than us. We're too old to get invovled in these matters..." She stopped talking when she realized Furzegaze wasn't listening.

His head was lifted and his jaws parted. His pupils were in slits, and his face held a perplexed expression.

"What's wrong?" Poppymask questioned.

"Where are they?" He whispered frantically, his voice full of unease.

"They've survived?" The tan and white she-cat questioned hopefully.

"No, Poppymask." Furzegaze examined the bloody scene with scrutiny. He approached two mounds of dirt and dug in a frenzy. His toil revealed the toms. "I found them." He announced, voice cracking.

"Are they alive?" The she-cat asked, rushing to his side. With one glance at their cloudy, soulless eyes, frozen in everlasting terror, all of her remaining hope was crushed. A lump formed in her throat, and her heart bled for her friends. She could not even *begin* to imagine what they must have felt.

"They can't be. Both of them have a clean, deep cut on their throat." He inspected the bodies of his friends grimly. There were less severe scratches across their pelts, particularly on their legs; defensive wounds. "There's brown fur in their claws...coated in mud...definitely feline. They didn't have a chance, but I can't understand why. It seems as though only one cat attacked them."

"The cat may have stalked them and picked them off separately." Her tone was chilled. Her numbness gave way to anger. "I swear to StarClan, whoever did this will pay."

Chapter One

"Burnetpaw! What in StarClan's name was that? You must try harder." A young golden tabby demanded scornfully, narrowing her eyes. She curled up her lips in a sneer, which make Burnetpaw's body flush with rage.

She was a true predator at heart, with endlessly dissatisfied saffron-colored eyes and an overabundance of lean muscle beneath her fur. It seemed as though, in another life, she had been a fierce bird of prey, who would tear apart her victims. Rather, in this life, she butchered her prey less literally, with uncivil remarks and disdainful gazes.

"Don't mentor Burnetpaw for me, Sunstreak." Nightfern interjected passive-aggressively.

Burnetpaw sighed loudly, rising back to her paws and shaking her pelt. *Take that, idiot!* She nearly exclaimed, but bit back the retort. *I must not lose my temper.* She reminded herself. *Nightfern wouldn't be pleased.*

She blinked her golden eyes at her sister's mentor, nodding curtly. Lifting her slender head, the lithe ticked tabby scented the air, letting out a content sigh as a warm breeze rushed over her. The weather had been foul recently, and she was grateful for such a bright day. The sun warmed her fur comfortably as the birds chirped in the hazy distance.

In the breeze was the scent of a stoat. Her heart skipped a beat as she envisioned catching such a creature. She would be praised by her entire Clan! Even so, stoats could easily kill a rabbit, and Burnetpaw figured that there was nothing stopping them from killing a cat. They were vicious and cunning. The mere thought of the little beasts made her fur stand up and her chest tighten with unease.

If I kill the stoat, maybe Sunstreak would stop teasing me. She

envisioned with hope. Burnetpaw swallowed her fear, turning towards Volepaw, Foxpaw and Sunstreak. "I smell a stoat. I'm going after it." She had already felt sore from chasing down a rabbit previously. Still, she was determined to catch the tiny devil, wherever it may be.

The dark ginger she-cat raced off towards the scent, letting her lean legs carry her in big bounds. She found the stoat wandering around upon the fresh moor, and had to remind herself of how hardy stoats could be, despite their small and vulnerable appearance.

The stoat spotted her and perked up, beginning its crazed tradition of leaping about as it came towards her. Stoats were known for jumping around to confuse its prey; almost hypnotizing it. Burnetpaw was well aware of its tactics, having been educated on the subject a few moons ago, and didn't stop to watch its show. For their minute stature, stoats were infamous among her Clanmates for scathing inexperienced cats, such as herself. Burnetpaw had to remain focused.

She crouched down, making sure to protect her soft stomach by brushing it against the long glass, and sprung into action. The stoat was just as prepared, and lunged at her with all of its strength. It grasped her tender ear, tearing off a piece with its sharp teeth.

Burnetpaw let out a yowl of anguish and lashed out at the fiendish animal, slicing its throat. Although it was mortally wounded, it still tried to fight back. She easily dodged its blows as it grew increasingly more sluggish as its blood rapidly drained. The red tabby watched as it died with a feeling of triumph, while it bravely struck at her up to the very end of its life.

She picked the limp prey up by the scruff, treading back to her comrades. Her wound came with a pounding, burning sensation which made her nauseous. She could hear her blood roar, and the chirps of birds were drowned out by the cacophonous sound.

Black spots swam in her vision due to the pain, yet she gritted her teeth together and kept herself from wincing. She focused on how the silky stoat blood felt on her tongue, thick like molasses and soothing. The metallic flavor reminded her of sweet danger,

something a code-abiding cat such as herself rarely got a taste of.

She often wished for a war, where she could express her instincts differently from hunting. Her talents were past hunting, but the peaceful nature of the times made it nearly impossible for her to show it. Perhaps if there were more quarrels, then her Clanmates would see past her flaws, and realize that she was a gifted fighter and a valuable warrior.

Sometimes it seemed that all her Clanmates could do was make remarks about her poor hunting abilities.

The three cats ran towards her, letting out cheers. Sunstreak sniffed, looking her up and down. "Good job. Your first battle scar." She tilted her nose towards Burnetpaw's wound.

Burnetpaw's pelt flushed at the rare compliment from the typically snide young cat, and she couldn't help but allow a smirk to creep upon her maw. Foxpaw nudged her sister good-naturedly, grinning at her while Volepaw, a cat who was known among young she-cats of all Clans for his flirtatious antics, quite obviously brushed pelts with the dainty green-eyed cat.

The group made their way back to camp. They struggled through the tall grass that occasionally bound their paws. Burnetpaw was the first to burst into camp. Despite how ill she felt from her minor yet sore wound, her chest puffed out with pride as she dropped the stoat into the prey pile.

Some of her Clanmates took a glimpse at the tall apprentice. Even less cats complimented her kill. For Burnetpaw, even the smallest amount of attention, after having been devoid of it nearly her entire apprenticeship, was rewarding. Brindlepaw walked out of the medicine cat den to congratulate her friends, but stopped mid-step the moment she saw Burnetpaw. The amiable amber-eyed tortoiseshell cat rushed forward, gawking at the huntress.

"What happened?" She gasped, lifting her head to sniff the big she-cat's ear. Burnetpaw shot the medicine cat apprentice a self-satisfied smirk and described the hostile stoat that she had caught.

Brindlepaw's eyes widened in awe at the explanation, as she was a weak and small feline with hardly any hunting or fighting skills whatsoever, and she ushered Burnetpaw into the den that she and Nuthatchface shared during the day. Nuthatchface was out collecting herbs, so Brindlepaw's mediocre skills had to be enough.

Brindlepaw still had several moons of training until she was an official medicine cat. She had always been a slow learner, and her role as a medicine cat apprentice was no different, in spite of having been in the position for five moons.

The tortoiseshell she-cat diligently chewed up a little burdock root, placing it onto the warrior apprentice's lacerated ear. "Don't paw it off." The medicine cat apprentice warned as she applied the herb, her strong catmint-like aroma swept through the compact, secure den.

Burnetpaw nodded in understanding, stirring from her sitting position. After Brindlepaw gave her poppy seeds, the ruddy apprentice walked from the den, calling out a thanks.

Chapter Two

Burnetpaw watched as a black and white tom-cat padded up to her, a sheepish smile across his muzzle.

"That stoat got you good, didn't it?" Crowstorm asked as he sat down next to her. He was Sunstreak's age; seven moons older than the lot of apprentices, yet he treated them as equals. While he was very close with the antagonistic and unlikable cat, he wasn't rude like her, and Burnetpaw enjoyed his company.

Burnetpaw wondered if Crowstorm was only friends with Sunstreak out of pity. After all, she couldn't see how anyone could want to be friends with the obnoxious molly, especially a cat as polite and good-natured as Crowstorm.

"Indeed." Burnetpaw chortled, her mouth curling into a smirk. "It definitely put up a good fight."

"I'm surprised that you actually managed to catch it. Excuse me for pointing this out, but you're typically a mess when it comes to hunting."

Burnetpaw chuckled, licking her chest fur in embarrassment. His observation stung, though she knew he meant no harm. "I have to admit, it was a terrible kill. Not at all clean. Though, could *you* catch a stoat, of all creatures, any differently? Frankly, I'm more than content with my catch."

"To be honest, probably not." Crowstorm shuddered as a lightning bolt struck at a distance, and thunder clapped throughout the otherwise ghost-quiet camp. "I think we'll get more rain tonight." The ebony tom stiffened as he stated this, as if the cold droplets were already pouring down his back.

"I dread it." Burnetpaw mumbled, exasperated. Even after a long day of training, she was surprised to see the sun going down, spreading a warm orange haze into the sky. She didn't know that

she had been training for that long. The time had slipped through her claws.

"Same with me." He responded, his fur rippling at another crack of thunder. "Someone is bound to get sick due to all of the rain."

"I hope not." The apprentice groaned with annoyance. "That would be another thing to add to WindClan's endless troubles."

Just then, a fluffy black kitten galloped towards them, accompanied by his slower, smaller brother, who was blind from birth.

"What're you two talking 'bout?" Shadekit inquired, Dovekit hiding behind him.

"This StarClan-cursed rain!" Crowstorm hissed as a few droplets hit his head. "It's as if it will never end."

"I love rain." Dovekit purred quietly. "I like how it feels against my coat."

"Are you a RiverClan cat?" Shadekit teased.

Being around the kits made her feel a little awkward, as she did not find any joy in their company and she did not know how to act. For some cats like Crowstorm, entertaining kits came naturally. Burnetpaw had not been granted that gift. She had never had the desire to, either. Kittens would only ever get in her way. She had ambitious plans, and she didn't have time for what parents felt for their kits.

"I'll be on my way before the rain starts." Burnetpaw declared, hauling up her haunches from the comfortable spot where she was sitting. "I may ask Sedgestar or Whitefoot if I can go hunting by myself before the rain is torrential. The Clan can never have too much prey." Truthfully, Burnetpaw did not want to go hunting again. She simply felt awkward entertaining the younger cats.

"Burnetpaw is such a goody-goody." Shadekit whispered in Crowstorm's ear. Burnetpaw let out a huff of annoyance. She also didn't like kits for their gossiping. No one could yell at them, because they were only kits who didn't know any better.

"Leave me alone!"

Burnetpaw's ears rotated towards the sound of her mother, Redclaw, yelling. She spun just in time to catch sight of Redclaw batting at Emberheart. The light ginger tom shrunk away from his mate's side.

"I'm sorry, I—"

"Just go away." Redclaw growled. Burnetpaw's father backed away, but suddenly, Redclaw's infuriated expression softened. "Wait, I'm sorry. It's just, you get me so frustrated sometimes."

Emberheart smiled. "I know." He assured her. "I'm sorry."

She glanced away. "Yeah..."

Burnetpaw scoffed in disgust. She wanted to shrink inside her body. She was incredibly embarrassed by her parents and the shameless spectacles that Redclaw put on. Redclaw was perpetually cruel, and Emberheart was a pushover. During moments in which her mother would bicker with Emberheart, Burnetpaw felt guilty for ever loving her mother, or for seeking Redclaw's approval. The desire to feel connected to the cat who reared her was just something she could not shake.

Burnetpaw decided not to hunt because the rain started to pour harder than before, but if she was honest with herself, that was an excuse. She had not wanted to go hunting to begin with. The product of her excursions was typically disappointment. Burnetpaw made her way to the apprentices' den with an already sodden pelt.

Her sister and Volepaw were chatting in their nests, though Brindlepaw was not. Burnetpaw assumed that her friend was being kept in the medicine cat den. As Nuthatchface's sight grew worse, the Clan was pressuring Brindlepaw to be the best medicine cat apprentice she could be. This caused Brindlepaw to lose sleep and have no time for herself.

Burnetpaw thought that to be unfair, considering Brindlepaw was a slow learner from the beginning who only fell back under pressure.

Burnetpaw had always had the strong sense to protect her friend, as she felt with Foxpaw- though a bit different- and so became worried when the minutes passed and Brindlepaw still hadn't shown up.

Grimacing at the idea of going into the harsh rain, Burnetpaw stood and exited the den briskly, trying to avoid much time in the rain. She darted into the medicine cat den, not at all relieved to see only Nuthatchface. She tried to sound as kind as she could be, but she had never been fond of the ancient medicine cat, who had grown only more insolent with age.

"Nuthatchface, do you know where Brindlepaw is?" Burnetpaw inquired, digging her claws into the ground impatiently.

"Yes." The grey tabby replied after a long amount of time. "I sent her out to fetch herbs. Why? Do you need her?"

"In this weather?" Burnetpaw cried out, shooting a glare at the medicine cat. "You must know that Brindlepaw is scared of storms like this. You had gone out collecting earlier, wasn't that enough?"

"I didn't find much, Burnetpaw. Everyone is aware of my fading vision. Brindlepaw's senses are sharper, so I told her search. She's her own cat and she needs to grow a spine. Someday, you won't be able to shelter her." The she-cat retorted, her tail tip twitching with impatience.

The apprentice snorted in disbelief, narrowing her yellow eyes. She turned on her heels, quickly trotting out of camp before her sister or parents could bother her. She did not like any of them much. She hated that her parents often made a fool of themselves, and in turn of her. Recently, Foxpaw had been disagreeable and Volepaw was to blame.

She took a deep, refreshing breath of the moor air. Tendrils of heather violently waved against the wind and rain, but Burnetpaw found it to be pretty. It was like the heather was dancing just for her. She paused to briefly watch, though quickly reminded herself of her mission. The sky was getting darker as the storm clouds billowed forward, casting a charcoal grey shade upon the rolling grasses.

"Brindlepaw!" She called out, straining her eyes in an attempt to spot the tortoiseshell cat through the pouring rain. Burnetpaw bounded forward as she saw a flash of dark brown, pale ginger and tan. She raced to the shivering frame of her friend.

Brindlepaw was breathing heavily, her pupils large with terror. She was shaking vigorously, and her fangs were chattering together. Burnetpaw took a step closer to the panicking multicolored cat, feeling fear for her friend's wellbeing rush upon her. "Brindlepaw, let's go to camp." She meowed quietly, crouching down.

Brindlepaw blinked rapidly as she felt Burnetpaw's pelt against hers, the heavy weight of terror ebbing away. She leaned into her instinctually and looked up towards the stormy sky. Burnetpaw attempted to make eye contact with the medicine cat apprentice, wondering if perhaps that would calm her down. To her dismay, Brindlepaw quickly looked down at her paws. So, Burnetpaw swiftly ran her tongue against Brindlepaw's cheek.

"Burnetpaw," Brindlepaw whispered breathlessly having collected herself. She winced as thunder continued to bellow in the distance. "I had a vision."

Chapter Three

"You must tell Nuthatchface." Burnetpaw prompted.

Burnetpaw was worried. Brindlepaw had explained to her that she had a vision in which WindClan camp was flooding, and cats were drowning. Brindlepaw had struggled to help them, but whenever she grabbed their scruffs in an attempt to haul them to land, they disappeared into the dark depths of the water. The water soon grew red with blood, and Brindlepaw had seen the leaders of the four Clans rise from the blood, furiously fighting with one another.

"I cannot! She would never believe me." Brindlepaw protested, beginning to shake once more. "She thinks I'm useless, and a lost cause."

"We should discuss this in camp." Burnetpaw told her.

Brindlepaw concurred, and wobbly stood while Burnetpaw stuck to her side. Burnetpaw's tail rested on the small of Brindlepaw's back as she guided the tortoiseshell cat back to camp.

Immediately, Brindlepaw sought shelter in the apprentices' den. Burnetpaw followed and curled up in her nest beside her. Foxpaw and Volepaw were already asleep.

"Please tell Nuthatchface." Burnetpaw begged in a hushed voice. "If she doesn't believe you, it will be her mistake. You know the burden will weigh heavy on your conscience if you never tell her."

Brindlepaw nodded hesitantly. "Okay... but only if you come with me. I don't get so shaken up when you're around."

Burnetpaw's eyes began to get heavy with unbeatable tiredness. She mumbled an incoherent agreement and promptly fell into a deep sleep.

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The day that Brindlepaw told Burnetpaw about her vision, Burnetpaw was horrified. However, in the two moons since that day, nothing had happened. It started to seem less like a vision and more like a nightmare, as Nuthatchface had declared when Brindlepaw informed her.

As Burnetpaw thought about it more, the prospect of war became exciting. Burnetpaw could finally prove her worth, and establish herself as an important cat of the Clan. Perhaps she'd even be a war hero. Maybe her mother would acknowledge Burnetpaw's usefulness and strength.

She felt guilty for being delighted by something that had caused her friend such distress. But she could not help herself. She was simply made for battle.

Burnetpaw laid in the apprentice's den, too exhausted to get up, although her mentor prodded her numerous times. She was tired from having trained frequently in the past two moons. *Will he ever leave me be?* Burnetpaw wondered, stifling a hiss of annoyance. She cracked an eye open to glare at him, then shut her daffodil-colored eye once more.

Additionally, Burnetpaw had not gotten any rest the night before. She turned over so that her back was to the black tom-cat, staring at the wall of the den through half-opened eyes. Burnetpaw knew her mentor was obligated to get her up and teach her, but that did not stop her from wishing that he would forget about his mentoring duties.

"Burnetpaw." Nightfern finally meowed sternly, getting the she-cat's attention. "I couldn't care less about how exhausted you are. It's imperative that you hunt today. You have less than a moon left until you become a warrior. I pray to StarClan that you won't be held back."

He added the last words quietly, but Burnetpaw still heard it with ease. She had instincts to fly into the action; to hastily sink her claws into the closest, most intimidating creature without contemplating the possible consequences. Burnetpaw was slow for a WindClan cat. The speed and smarts of the prey that lived on the

moors challenged her.

"Can't I clean the elder's den and remove their ticks with Brindlepaw?" Burnetpaw asked with little hope in her voice, watching her tone so that she would not sound as frustrated as she was.

"That's a job for... talentless or troublesome cats. You need to be better at hunting in order to become a warrior." He said the words tentatively, but Burnetpaw was still annoyed. *Helping the elders is a very important job! If I weren't his apprentice I'd show him...*

"The elders need care. That's a necessary task, Nightfern. Brindlepaw may not learn as quickly as the rest of us, but she's certainly not talentless, nor troublesome. I thought you knew better than to label her as such." Burnetpaw picked her words carefully, trying hard not to lose her temper. She got to her paws as she spoke. She was nearly as tall as the black tom. She tilted her head upwards to appear taller than him, hoping her words had swayed him.

Her mentor sighed with annoyance and exhaustion, his calm façade fading. "You know I didn't mean it that way... I'm just... You're aware of... Dovekit's disability. I've not been focusing. I haven't reflected enough upon what I say." He struggled with his words, hanging his head low. With that view, Brindlepaw could see that grey patches of fur were slowly creeping onto his muzzle, and remembered that her lion-hearted mentor was also a senior warrior. He was tired.

"I can't say I understand, though I'll try. I'll go hunting with all of you, but you know as well as me that I can't promise anything." Burnetpaw huffed. *I have to train. I have to pass my assessment.* She followed her mentor out of the den rather reluctantly, startled by the bustle within camp. *I slept longer than I intended to.* Burnetpaw noticed Crowstorm and Sycamorelight sharing a fat rabbit. She beamed at them, and both toms nodded in acknowledgement of her.

"Sunstreak! Wait for us!" Nightfern bounded towards Sunstreak, Foxpaw, Volepaw and Featherpool.

"Took you long enough." Foxpaw mumbled, averting her eyes. Burnetpaw shot a glare at her sister. *She used to be so kind, but not ever since she began spending more time with Volepaw. Nowadays she's always moody.*

"Are you sure you want to be a warrior, or do you just want to mess around with the medicine cats all day? I'm sure they'll be happy to have you." Burnetpaw stared at Sunstreak with disbelief and hot anger as the golden tabby meowed.

She did not think to bottle up what she had wanted to say for so long as the venomous words spilled uncontrollably out of her mouth; "Who are you to judge? You were only picked to mentor because you're the leader's daughter. I wish Sedgestar heard what comes out of your StarClan-cursed mouth! Sunstreak, I watch you ridicule cats as you quake in fear before your opponent. You're a piece of foxdung, and a coward, but you hide your weaknesses by bringing attention to your Clanmates' flaws. Don't you realize that you have flaws too? You have more flaws than all the rest of us!"

She bunched up her muzzle in a snarl, staring at the golden tabby with challenge in her eyes. How she wished to attack her enemy! She was half hoping that Sunstreak would strike her, so she'd have a reason to put the egotistical warrior in her place.

"How dare you say such things!" Sunstreak yowled, spitting in fury. "You're a fool and you've been endlessly disrespectful! You and your sharp tongue have plagued me since you've become an apprentice. You don't deserve to become a warrior, and I pray to StarClan every night that Sedgestar will not allow it."

Chapter Four

Sedgestar had always been protective of his kit. According to him, she was like her mother; the only cat who had been by his side at all times. Although, she had been elusive. The common rumor was that Sunstreak's mother had not planned to have a kit, and she chose not to be involved in her daughter's life.

Cats guessed who Sunstreak's mother was. Some even speculated that Redclaw was Sunstreak's mother, but Burnetpaw did not believe it. She and Sunstreak could never be half-sisters. Redclaw and Sedgestar had denied the rumor. Yet, because Sedgestar rarely spoke about Sunstreak's mother, felines continued to babble about it.

Nightfern shifted between the two she-cats, eyeing them both with mistrust.

"You're much worse than I!" Burnetpaw retorted.

"This is horribly foolish. Both of you are making a scene." Featherpool, a small grey tom, finally spoke up.

The russet cat wanted to tell Sunstreak how much she resented her and how she wished the she-cat would die, but she did not want to argue with Featherpool. Sunstreak simply spun around and headed out of camp. Glancing at one another with confused expressions, Volepaw and Foxpaw followed her. Soon afterwards, Nightfern, Burnetpaw and Featherpool walked towards the stretching moors. Burnetpaw felt her Clanmates' gazes on the group of cats as they left camp.

"That was quite a shock, coming from you." Nightfern mumbled to his apprentice.

"Yeah? You should know me better than that. I don't respect bullies." She replied, an annoyed undertone in her mew.

"There may be something going on with Sunstreak that we just can't see. Try not to be so judgmental of other cats, in spite of their faults." The long-furred senior warrior said calmly, his eyes squinted with fatherly affection and wisdom.

"Nah." The apprentice mumbled dismissively. *Anything that Sunstreak is going through cannot excuse her horrid behavior.* She hurried forward towards her fellow apprentices, watching them closely. She did not trust Volepaw much, considering his reputation to flirt with any molly that he wanted to play with, and Burnetpaw doubted he was genuinely interested in Foxpaw.

"What are you two doing?" Burnetpaw interrupted their conversation abruptly, forcing her way in between the cats.

"Talking." Volepaw replied, his ears back. "That was really mousebrained of you to speak to Sunstreak like that." He glanced over at Foxpaw. "Right, Foxpaw?"

Foxpaw blinked with surprise at the question, before nodding hesitantly. "Uh... I guess." She said awkwardly, shifting her paws.

"Someone had to say it." She snapped to them, tail bushing. "I don't regret it. I don't regret anything I've ever done." She felt her claws slide out as hate rose within her. *I shouldn't be afraid to speak my mind. I've no need to feel ashamed from retaliating against those who have done me wrong.* She decided.

"I'm not happy with the way she treats cats, but that was uncalled for." Volepaw grunted.

Burnetpaw opened her mouth to retort. Before she could, Volepaw strutted ahead. Foxpaw looked from Burnetpaw to Volepaw, and then stumbled after Volepaw.

Burnetpaw scoffed. *How unbelievable!* She thought, kneading her paws into the grass with anger. She tilted her chin upwards, trotting past them and slamming her shoulder into Volepaw's. She shared a heated stare with him before racing up the path to lead the group. *That'll show him.* Her blast of adrenaline dropped as Nightfern approached her.

"That was very immature. You're nearly a warrior, Burnetpaw. You've got to start acting like one." Nightfern huffed under his breath so that only she could hear.

Burnetpaw frowned, flicking her tail with irritability. *Why is he always on my tail? It's like he has a sixth sense for when I do things he wouldn't like. Can't he ever leave me alone?* She ignored his comment, though her anger lasted.

Sunstreak, who was behind Burnetpaw, came to an abrupt stop and turned towards the other cats. "I say this is where we should hunt."

"I think that this is an awful place." Burnetpaw objected for the sake of being cross, though the territory that Sunstreak had chosen seemed to be full of small mammals.

"Well, it's a *fine* place." Sunstreak snapped, and the other apprentices nodded with approval.

"Should we spread out?" Featherpool suggested, but was ignored by the other mentors, who were already distracted by scenting the air.

Fuming, Burnetpaw padded away from the group. She spotted a rabbit who was nibbling on a clover patch a few foxlengths away. She crouched close to the ground, the collections of bluestems hiding her from the rabbit's sharp sight. It stiffened as her scent blew upwind, and she leapt out from hiding, racing towards it as it turned tail and sprinted away.

She sighed heavily as it disappeared into the undergrowth. Her ears perked up as she heard a scream of distress that was abruptly cut off, and soon after she watched Sunstreak come out of the bushes with the rabbit, tail high.

Burnetpaw grumbled, got up, and walked away. She parted her maw to scent the air, catching the tasty scent of a water vole. The she-cat spotted the lake in the distance and followed the vole's trail until she reached the lake, which was surrounded by tall grasses.

She sniffed the blades of tall grass just before the fat vole darted out from its hiding spot in a panic. Before she could consider how to

kill it, Burnetpaw spontaneously pressed her paw onto it, unceremoniously ending its life. While its body was pierced with claw marks and now looked unappetizing, she supposed it had to do for now.

The ginger ticked tabby dug a hole and buried her catch, her ears going back as the winds picked up and the light rain turned into a downpour. Another water vole's aroma drifted towards her close to where she found the first one. Burnetpaw crouched down, though her lanky limbs still made her look massive. The vole soon spotted her but stood frozen in fear, which made it an easy catch.

She trotted back to the hunting patrol's starting point, her tail lifted proudly as she met Foxpaw at the end of the trail. "'Suppose it runs in the family?" Burnetpaw meowed, referring to Foxpaw's lack of prey.

"No," Replied the dark red cat, offended. "Volepaw said he'd carry it for me."

Burnetpaw's tail drooped as Volepaw padded towards them with a surplus of prey, dropping it at Foxpaw's paws. His eyes drifted towards Burnetpaw's measly catch. Volepaw faked a frown.

"That's quite a pity, Burnetpaw. But at least Foxpaw and I have got enough."

Burnetpaw hissed in reaction to his crude remark, yet the she-cat remained quiet until the mentors returned.

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Nightfern commented on Burnetpaw's successful kills, which made her feel a bit better, but it wasn't until she saw Brindlepaw as they were approaching camp that she truly felt at ease. She ran over to Brindlepaw, dropping the voles. "Brindlepaw, can we eat together?"

Brindlepaw's breathing was heavy and her long fur drenched. She shook her head sadly, sitting down to groom herself swiftly. "I'm sorry, Burnetpaw, I have a lot of work. A tree nearly fell on Sycamorelight while he and Crowstorm were patrolling the

ThunderClan border. Although it didn't crush him, a big branch did smack him, and he's in shock." Brindlepaw finished speaking just as lightning struck a small tree in camp.

The wind was howling so loudly that Burnetpaw could barely hear Brindlepaw, and the constant rain harshly pelted against her body.

Sedgestar and Redclaw had been quietly conversing. Both of their gazes expressed their outrage. Burnetpaw was unable to hear them. Her ears tilted forward and she slowly inched towards them. Suddenly, Redclaw yowled something about a secret, with a disgusted look full of hatred on her sharp features.

Burnetpaw's large ears pressed to her head. She crept away with unease. She was shocked that the best friends were having such a heated argument, and knew that it had to be serious.

Chapter Five

In a flash, lightning struck a sapling in camp. It *CRACKED* loudly and fell, crushing the warrior's den. There were yowls of alarm as cats dodged the sapling. One cat's tail was nearly set aflame. The heavy rain soon put out the fire. Even so, the damage was already done.

The rainfall abruptly got worse, and water began to flood into camp at an alarming speed. The cats of WindClan blathered with bewilderment and terror, simply watching as the water pooled. Burnetpaw glanced at Sedgestar for guidance, only to see that he, too, was frozen in shock.

"The herbs!" Brindlepaw cried out as a rapid stream began to form, leading up to the medicine cat den.

Sycamorelight stepped out of the den, his head tilted oddly to the left side and his left eye squinting. He stayed silent as he pushed past the chaos aimlessly, his gait irregular. He looked as if the wind would blow him away any second. Burnetpaw came to the conclusion that the branch must have damaged his brain in some way. She worried that he would not survive without a cat to help him out of camp, but she was too overwhelmed by the events to think clearly.

Seeing Dovekit and Shadekit, Burnetpaw picked up Dovekit by the scruff and set him down on the fallen tree. She turned and realized with alarm that Shadekit had disappeared, and that his parents were nowhere to be found.

Her tense muscles somewhat relaxed as Sedgestar sped past her, Shadekit being held by his scruff. "Sedgestar, do you know where Nightfern and Goosepounce are?" She asked him anxiously.

The pale tabby shook his head, hurrying up the hill that led out of camp until he was out of the russet cat's view. She struggled through the rising water and jumped onto the fallen log, seeing that

Foxpaw was seeking shelter there. The water was already up to her belly, and the log was rocking at the weight of Foxpaw, Dovekit and Burnetpaw.

"How do we get away from here without drowning?" Dovekit asked quietly, his unfixed stare wavering.

"I... Don't know." Burnetpaw tried not to let the sinking feeling in her stomach cloud her thinking. "Have you got any ideas, Foxpaw?" Every few seconds the water level was escalating, and she was jolted out of her thoughts of a plan as she heard a chilling cry for help. *Brindlepaw!* "I'll be right back, stay here." She told them as she jumped off of the log, swimming through the current and reaching the medicine cat den.

Brindlepaw's head was barely above the water, holding a bundle of herbs. "I can't swim. I can't do it. This is all my fault!" She whispered, frozen in fear.

"Let go of the herbs and try to tread water." Burnetpaw instructed, struggling to keep her head above the water as it rushed towards the roof of the den. Brindlepaw went underwater for a terrifying moment. She resurfaced with the herb bundle out of her mouth. She let out a panicked wail, and Burnetpaw tried to pull her close through her effort to stay afloat.

"This isn't your fault. I'll carry you if you need me to." While Brindlepaw had a lot of fur, she was remarkably petite, and Burnetpaw could hold the tortoiseshell's weight if she needed to.

"I'll... I'll just stay with you. You don't have to carry me like a defenseless kit. Where's Cypressdust and Olivetuft?" The medicine cat apprentice's eyes searched the camp for her kin.

Burnetpaw didn't answer. She watched as Foxpaw swam past them with Volepaw next to her, and growled under her breath. *Why would she leave Dovekit alone? She's so negligent!* Burnetpaw needed to return to Dovekit soon. She feared that he would get hurt.

Burnetpaw swam through the raging water with Brindlepaw by her side, grabbing the cat's scruff up a few times when she thought that

the she-cat would go underwater. Within a few awful seconds, though it felt like an eternity, they reached the log.

Dovekit was missing.

"Dovekit!" Burnetpaw yowled loudly, scanning the water frantically. The cats that remained in camp were now searching for him as well, pushing through the strong current.

Thunder boomed up above, and the russet she-cat winced at the ear-splitting sound. As the water rose steadily, Burnetpaw found swimming to be harder; her muscles ached and her senses sharpened to a hyper degree, making her head hurt.

Something brushed up against her. She was appalled to see a limp light brown body the size of a warrior floating next to her, his blue eyes glossed over.

"Sycamorelight needs help!" Brindlepaw tried to reach the tom, but Burnetpaw hauled her back. With a single glance at his body, the Clanmates that remained in camp looked away quickly, not bothering to come over. They resumed their search for Dovekit.

Nightfern was calling for his son, while Greyfeather, Sycamorelight's mate, screamed in anguish, pushing past the debris to the tom's floating body. Burnetpaw turned away from the grieving lover, and began to yell louder for Dovekit.

She didn't enjoy *this* danger. It was much different from the rush she felt when she fought.

Another string of lightning momentarily blinded Burnetpaw. When her eyes focused she saw Sedgestar racing up the hill out of camp. She hadn't even realized he had been in camp. His long brown fur was pressed against his muscular frame. He had a new scratch along his muzzle.

"We must get uphill. It's too dangerous to continue our search." The leader called out, his sides heaving heavily. "We need to count who is missing, and to do that we all need to be together." He beckoned Sunstreak, who was idling, with his tail. The she-cat briskly trotted

to her father, head bowed.

Burnetpaw sighed sadly, though she didn't dare to challenge Sedgestar. She treaded through the water while Whitefoot helped Brindlepaw reach safety. She almost collapsed as her paws hit dry land, stumbling up the hill in a daze. Burnetpaw clambered up the ravine. The water was rushing down, and she slipped. Her claws scrabbled on the rock and her heart shot to her stomach in panic.

Myrtleleap lurched forward and grasped onto Burnetpaw's scruff before she tumbled down. The apprentice tried to get a footing on the stone, and with their joint effort, the lilac tabby successfully brought Burnetpaw out of WindClan camp.

"Thank you." Burnetpaw meowed, her voice wavering.

"No problem." The warrior chirped. She disappeared into the crowd of WindClan cats.

Cypressdust and Olivetuft, Brindlepaw's family, scampered over to her. The tortoiseshell she-cat nuzzled into her mother's fur while her brother licked her pelt.

"We didn't know where you had gone..." The tabby tom said, his voice cracking.

"Burnetpaw took care of me. She saved me." Brindlepaw's response was muffled by Olivetuft's coat.

Goosepounce was hunched over wheezing with a pool of water and bile below them, water leaking out of their nose and mouth. Nightfern, though a distraught cat himself, offered them comfort. Nuthatchface, Goosepounce's aunt, stood beside the pale grey tabby, her tail resting on their flank in a calming manner. While Volepaw and his mother, Batwing, were speaking quietly in the outskirts.

Burnetpaw was not surprised to notice that Sunstreak shook with fear. Sedgestar comforted her, his tail draped on her back. He whispered hushed words of reassurance in her ear. The russet cat narrowed her eyes.

Chapter Six

Burnetpaw's father and grandfather were standing over a limp ruddy body, and upon closer inspection she saw that it was her mother. Blood pooled under her head. Redclaw had presumably smacked her head on a rock. She ran to them, feeling sorry that she was worried for her mother. "Is she dead?" Burnetpaw asked Emberheart, who had a wide claw mark on his cheek.

"Yes." Said the ginger tom-cat, flicking his ear.

"Was she murdered?" With a glimpse at his fresh lesion, she couldn't help but wonder... "Emberheart, did you kill her?" Burnetpaw whispered to her father. She didn't think about the possible impact of her words.

Her eyes flickered from the tom's face and Redclaw, her mother's jaws gaped open in fear and small wounds were across her pelt. Though it would be out of character for her father, Burnetpaw believed that any cat was capable of anything.

"What a morbid thought. Why would you think that? Burnetpaw, that's absurd!" Tallears scorned.

"StarClan, no! No cat killed her!" Emberheart gasped, shocked that his daughter thought he was able to commit *murder*. "She was mad at me, and she left my sight for a few minutes, and then... Even though she was quick to anger, it was *my* fault... I would never..."

"It was *not* your fault. Don't ever think that the way she treated you was your fault. I wish I would have noticed..." Tallears told his son.

Burnetpaw eyed Tallears. She knew that he was aware. She had seen him watch her parents' quarrels, a faint glimmer of hope in his gaze as he had waited for Emberheart to defend himself. *Everyone is a liar in this Clan.* Burnetpaw seethed. Her optics flickered back to Redclaw's body.

Something about her untimely death didn't make sense, yet part of Burnetpaw did not want to know what had really happened.

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She pondered upon a new realization for quite some time; she had always thought that if she had been in her father's position, she would have killed Redclaw without an inkling of regret, even if she was caught. Though, as she stared at her mother's body, it wasn't that simple. She would miss the cat who had borne her.

Foxpaw had an uncaring attitude towards her mother's death, which made Burnetpaw furious. Brindlepaw tried to comfort her, yet the russet apprentice was more angry than sad. She felt cheated. Redclaw could have been a wonderful mother and mate, but she had chosen not to be. She wondered *why* she felt so affected by her mother's death. Burnetpaw's emotions had betrayed her. She ignored the medicine cat apprentice until Brindlepaw gave up and left.

After a few moments, Crowstorm approached her.

"Hey, Burnetpaw." He mewed to her. Crowstorm, too, was upset, for his best friend had been injured on his watch, and had died during the storm.

"Hi...?" Burnetpaw sat down and began to groom herself, waiting for his reply with little interest. She was too concerned about where WindClan was going to live to be bothered with small talk.

"I want to give you my condolences for your loss. Your mother was a great warrior." Crowstorm meowed as he stared at the ground.

Burnetpaw was torn. She wanted to tell Crowstorm that Redclaw was horrendous, but she knew that wouldn't be appropriate. Burnetpaw took a moment to reply as she thought of the right words to say. "Ah, she... She was."

He quirked a cat brow and she added; "I'm sorry if I'm not quite myself, I'm just in shock." *That's certainly not a lie.* She figured. The she-cat changed the conversation quickly. "Are you okay?"

"Honestly? No." He sighed, obviously finding her comment about Redclaw a bit strange, though he must not have wanted to pry.

"Oh. I'm sorry about Sycamorelight, truly." Burnetpaw lowered her head respectfully. Her brows furrowed with sorrow as she recalled the horrific sight of her Clanmate's lifeless body.

"I'll be okay, I think. I have Sunstreak to comfort me, after all." Crowstorm mumbled, staring at his large white paws.

"Yeah." The apprentice agreed with dismay. She always found it annoying that her only enemy and one of her few confidantes were friends, if not lovers. "If you don't mind me asking, how can you tolerate her? She's a foxheart." Burnetpaw commented bluntly.

She was surprised when Crowstorm didn't bother to defend the golden tabby. She tilted her head slightly to him, and he exhaled.

"Sometimes I can't help but agree." He muttered. "But she needs me, just as I need her. It's been like that since we were in the nursery together. We're the closest of friends, even if she's obscene." Burnetpaw nodded with a bit of understanding. She could kind of apply what he said to her relationship with Brindlepaw. However, the tortoiseshell medicine cat apprentice was far more well-mannered than Sunstreak. Even if she weren't, Burnetpaw wouldn't want to cut her off. She would not be able to bring herself to. There was just something about Brindlepaw.

"WindClan!" The felines stopped their conversations one by one as they turned to face Sedgestar. "Cats of WindClan, it is with a heavy heart that I deliver this news; our death count has totaled to three cats. We have lost Sycamorelight, Dovekit, and-" His raw voice broke. "My dear friend, Redclaw. Although our territory is a bit unpredictable, I believe that it would be safer to stay here."

Soft murmurs of sadness and disbelief drifted through the clearing. Hearing Dovekit's name again, Burnetpaw felt her heart sink into her stomach. *It isn't fair, and Foxpaw is to blame.* She thought. She glanced around at her drenched Clanmates, who were all exhausted and cold.

"Shouldn't we go somewhere else, Sedgestar?" Myrtleleap meowed quietly, her soft orange eyes swimming with concern.

"No." Sedgestar mewed firmly. "We'll be safe here."

"The horseplace would be ideal." Cypressdust warned him, his tail flicking with annoyance.

Sedgestar insisted upon staying in camp.

"Only downright idiots would remain in camp. Are we idiots?" Burnetpaw growled.

Sedgestar grew nervous and assertive. As the murmurs of disapproval and shouts increased, and his control over his Clan slipping, he finally caved. "If all of you insist, we'll go to the horseplace."

With their leader's reluctant agreement to go to the horseplace, WindClan began their trek. Before the cats left, Burnetpaw took one last glance at WindClan camp; so familiar and comfortable to her. Where her fondest memories had been formed and where she had developed into the cat she was now.

It was in ruins.

Chapter Seven

(a/n: I don't remember this chapter being so short but uh...)

To the WindClan cats' alarm, the stretching fields between RiverClan and WindClan territory had been affected by the rainfall as well. Shapes of other cats on the horseplace territory gave Burnetpaw some hope that maybe, for now, WindClan would have a home.

While the rain relentlessly fell, the choppy waters rose on declines in the hillside. The russet she-cat clenched her jaw as she felt the slippery mud beneath her paws, realizing that she could easily fall. *I must keep my paws steady, or I'll slide towards the lake.*

"Come over here!" Whitefoot tried to call out to the cats in the distance, although they couldn't hear her over the winds.

Burnetpaw's paws gave out from under her as a cat shoved into her side. Mud dragged her down the highland and towards the lake. The apprentice spotted Volepaw, looking at her with wide eyes, a vanishing snicker on his maw. *He pushed me!* It was clear that his intention wasn't to send her tumbling, yet that did not matter to Burnetpaw. She fought the mud, but she failed to grasp onto the ground. The feline tumbled down the hill, her fur becoming soiled. She called out to her Clanmates just as her body slammed into the lake. A group of WindClan cats had rushed over to the lakeshore, however were too afraid to help her.

In spite of the rain, wind, and untamed waters, Burnetpaw did not want to give up. She flailed around in hysteria, and heard Brindlepaw calling out her name. Meanwhile, most of her Clanmates tried to slowly make their way down to where the lake began.

She heard a splash as another cat entered the water, and just as she started gasping for nonexistent air, filling her lungs with cold water, a cat lifted her out of the lake. She coughed up the water while her

body pleaded for breaths, being pulled through the lake as if she were but a twig. She was laid onto the sand and looked up at the cat who had pulled her out of the water.

A tom-cat with lean muscle and hazel eyes looked down at her, as if he had never seen a WindClan cat before. *Maybe he hasn't.* She realized. His sleek grey tabby pelt was soaked, and he was shivering. He was looking off deeper into the territory at something Burnetpaw couldn't see.

"Um, thanks." She mewed after catching her breath, a fit of coughing following.

"You should have stayed on land." He said with good nature.

"I don't think I could have." Burnetpaw replied, standing up with trembling paws. The RiverClan cat shot a smile at her; it was unsettling and something she could imagine was rare from him. The RiverClan tom made her uncomfortable. Something about him was odd.

He raced off towards the thing that he had had his gaze fixed on. She began to groom her muddy pelt, but the rain was already washing the mud off of her. Some of her Clanmates were already surrounding her, anxious murmurs filling the air.

"Burnetpaw! Are you okay?" Brindlepaw raced up to her, the medicine cat's fluffy tortoiseshell pelt dripping from the rainwater. Worry clouded her alluring amber eyes, the pretty she-cat shivering anxiously.

Seeing her friend's face, Burnetpaw smiled with exhaustion as the sun slowly dipped below the horizon, warm colors tinting every cats' fur as if they were part of the sunset. "That was quite an experience, but I'm fine. I can't say I'd willingly fall into the lake again."

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Burnetpaw awoke to Brindlepaw's warm pelt pressed against hers. The other apprentices of RiverClan and WindClan slept around

them. She blinked away the tiredness from her eyes, tilting her ears forward as she heard the quiet murmurs of the two leaders.

"If the rain continues, we must move soon. This barn is too old to withstand a lasting hurricane. We could ask ThunderClan and ShadowClan for assistance." She heard Sedgestar say, his voice coated with worry.

"Will our warriors like that idea? They're exhausted." Kestrelstar countered.

"We can send out a hunting patrol and have the medicine cats collect herbs. Once every cat has a fresh meal and is treated, we can leave." The WindClan leader said with finality. Kestrelstar nodded, and the two parted ways.

Where will we go? Burnetpaw worried, dark thoughts and unanswered questions engulfing her.

She felt Brindlepaw rustle awake beside her, and nudged the she-cat gently. "You should find Nuthatchface. I overheard Sedgestar and Kestrelstar talking about getting the medicine cats to treat everyone."

Chapter Eight

"Okay, thank you for telling me." Brindlepaw mewed, yawning. She stood up and stretched, carefully resting her chin on Burnetpaw's forehead for a moment. Quickly, Brindlepaw pulled away and trotted from where the apprentices had slept.

Burnetpaw was disappointed that the sweet-scented tortoiseshell's heat had left her, and stood up, flicking her ear as droplets began to hit the roof. *The rain has started again...* She noted with dismay, although grateful that she had protection from the rainfall.

"Cats of RiverClan and WindClan," Kestrelstar called out, Burnetpaw's head turning towards him. He was standing on a tall stack of hay. "After speaking with Sedgestar, we've decided upon the best hunting patrols consisting of the most skilled hunters. Greyfeather, you will lead the first hunting patrol with Emberheart and Whitefoot. Mothtail will lead the RiverClan patrol. Oatflight and Daisyfern will go with you. Hunt wherever you find most suitable."

"Darn, it looks like apprentices aren't invited." Burnetpaw heard a cat mumble next to her. She turned, seeing the tom that had helped her the night before.

"Uh, hello!" She exclaimed, smiling. "I never got your name." The cat seemed to be surprised - almost embarrassed - and she realized that he had been talking to himself, not her.

"I'm called Hailpaw. You?" He was shorter than Burnetpaw, and more muscular. He held himself with a mysterious and odd aura.

"My name's Burnetpaw. I'm pretty glad that they didn't include 'paws, because I'm terrible with hunting." She responded, sitting down. "Were you injured during the flood? Three of my Clanmates have passed." Burnetpaw mumbled sadly, a wave of melancholy washing over her as she recalled the horrors of the night before.

"Um, that's terrible." Hailpaw said, his voice and glimmering eyes empty.

"My sister, Webpaw, died last night. My fathers died many moons before now. I do still have Egretnose; he's older than my sister and I." He was a strong cat, which was something Burnetpaw could admire, yet she still thought he was awfully strange.

"You're Sweetblossom's and Vultureskip's kit, aren't you?"

Hailpaw nodded.

"StarClan, when I was younger, their deaths were all my Clan talked about. Everyone was so scared; no one knew who or what killed them-" Burnetpaw became aware that she was being impolite. "...I'm sorry that you had to go through that." She couldn't imagine what life without Foxpaw, Tallears and Emberheart would be like, although her sister got on her nerves.

"I'm okay. My parents died before I could get too close to them. My brother says I really shouldn't talk about them." He responded briskly, in a dull tone. Hailpaw stood abruptly before Burnetpaw could reply and padded away. She could detect a small sniffle coming from him, but didn't know if she was only hearing things.

I suppose our conversation is over. She thought, feeling a little awkward now that she was sitting by her lonesome. Burnetpaw studied the two leaders. Kestrelstar caught her staring, and she quickly looked away.

Whimpering could be heard from where she was, and she began to feel uneasy and peeved. Burnetpaw wondered if cats were arguing, and wanted to dissolve the situation. As she crept upon the cluster of wooden crates, she was surprised to see a singular cat with a grey tabby coat. The cat darted its head up when she stepped on a creaking floorboard, and revealed itself as Hailpaw.

"I thought there was a problem. Are you alright?" Burnetpaw asked. She then added as an afterthought; "Do you want to talk?"

"I'm- go away." Hailpaw snarled coldly, trying to regain his cool

composure. The tom-cat attempted to calm down his messy fur.

Burnetpaw's temper spiked with impatience. She loathed when cats didn't listen to what she had to say. She thought that she deserved to be heard, no matter what. The ginger she-cat was more aggravated than she had been initially. "Fine. I was only trying to help. Maybe you shouldn't make so much noise the next time you wallow in self-pity." Burnetpaw scolded sharply, walking away. She could see that the RiverClan cat had been taken aback by her outburst, but she couldn't care less.

Burnetpaw dug her claws into the ground, wondering if she was overly erratic. *No, I'm not.* She stifled those thoughts. *I speak my mind, and some cats don't like that. To the Darkforest with them.* She puffed out her chest and retracted her claws, lifting her paw to lick it.

Chapter Nine

She was happy that she wouldn't have to spend any time with Foxpaw's insufferable mentor, or Volepaw, who seemed to hate her as much as she hated him, yet she still felt unsatisfied with the day. Burnetpaw padded over to the corner of the camp where the prey was being held, but noticed that she was being beckoned by the WindClan leader and walked over curiously.

"Yes?" She asked, tilting her head.

"You're going to go on a patrol with Myrtleleap and Waspsong." Burnetpaw looked around for them as her leader mewed. "They've already left. They were so busy gossiping that they didn't hear me calling out to them. I suggest you catch up." Sedgestar said.

Burnetpaw sighed with frustration, and opened her jaws to say something rude, but instead closed them and ran out into the field, billowing clouds and stormy skies above her. She was excited to get away from the crowded area and stretch her legs. Burnetpaw noted as she sprinted through the grass that the lake was moving inwards, turning the surrounding area into ShadowClan-esque marshland.

She caught up to the conversing cats, who were quite baffled by her sudden appearance. "Sedgestar sent me, though had you listened to him you would know." She told them.

"Kestrelstar said only the most skilled cats would patrol." Myrtleleap let it slip before she realized how the statement could be perceived. Burnetpaw furrowed her cat brows. She would usually claw the ears off of anyone who dared to say such a thing, but Myrtleleap was so upset with herself and had always been a very shy she-cat.

She had been quiet since kithood, and had been teased by other cats during her time as an apprentice. Burnetpaw couldn't bring herself to do anything other than smile with forgiveness.

"Patrolling the territory doesn't take much skill. Had this been a

hunting patrol, however, it would be a completely different situation." Burnetpaw mewed, chuckling.

Though she didn't like to mull upon her flaws, the harsh reality was that Burnetpaw was an eleven-moon-old cat with limited hunting skills.

Myrtleleap still seemed as though she would bite at herself with mortification. The patrol sauntered on.

Burnetpaw had always been confident; so fixated upon her success, that when faced with the possibility of failing, she was in pieces. The weasel-like cat - flamboyant, brave, and foolish - was at a standstill to which she saw no resolution. She couldn't envision herself suddenly becoming an apex hunter within a moon. To fail her assessment would be a great disgrace. The notion was formidable.

"What had you two been talking about before I arrived?" Burnetpaw inquired, her tone flat, breaking the silence and trying to distract her mind from her vexation. If she talked to them about unrelated subjects, perhaps her struggles with hunting would go away. Maybe she would miraculously become the best huntress.

"Oh. Well, we were talking about the most attractive cats in the Clans." Waspsong explained, shooting a grin towards Burnetpaw. Hedgeleap looked horrified, staring at Waspsong with big, pleading eyes.

"You see, Hedgeleap has a bit of a crush on Egretnose, while I stick to my own Clan. I think Crowstorm is handsome, but you and him are as close as mates, right?" Waspsong seemed genuinely curious, and Burnetpaw knew that the warrior wasn't just pulling her tail, but she couldn't stop from snarling at the idea.

"He is my friend and nothing more."

"Aw, I know you're in love with him. You don't have to hide it." The tabby cooed.

"That's gross! Toms aren't even attractive!" Burnetpaw stopped

herself quickly, and looked at her paws.

"You like she-cats? Um, so long as you don't have a crush on me I support you, I guess..." Meowed Waspsong, while Myrtleleap seemed ashamed of her friend, although she kept her jaws clamped shut.

"I don't seek your support." She growled. "Do you think that I have a crush on every molly I speak with? It's really vain of you to assume that I'm into you just because I like she-cats." Said Burnetpaw curtly. "Moreover," She mentioned after quite awhile, "You're completely not my type." Immediately, Brindlepaw came to mind, which startled Burnetpaw, seeing as the she-cat was training to become a medicine cat.

They were silent for a long time as they patrolled the territory. Waspsong's expressions varied between confused and offended. She looked as if she wanted to say something, but had no idea what to say. When the winds picked up and the lightning flashed throughout the sky, they headed towards camp.

Burnetpaw, after having been distracted by the nonsensical conversation, remembered rumors of tensions rising within the barn. Surely, the rain could only fall so much before the cats of RiverClan and WindClan destroyed one another.

Chapter Ten

The hurricane had lasted much too long for Burnetpaw's comfort. Even the next afternoon, after the leaders and medicine cats had left to visit ThunderClan and ShadowClan, the ginger she-cat felt as if there was a boulder weighing down on her chest. Burnetpaw knew that RiverClan's and WindClan's issues were far from over.

The constant harsh rain had subsided so that the patrols could venture further away from camp. Burnetpaw's greatest hope was that ThunderClan and ShadowClan would offer shelter to the two shredded Clans. Still, she fretted that something would go wrong. The leaders of ShadowClan and ThunderClan were selfish and untrustworthy; it would be no surprise if they refused to help.

Boredom took hold of Burnetpaw throughout the afternoon. There were no training sessions, and she could nearly taste the apprehension in the air. Every cat was waiting for the medicine cats and leaders to return. Longing for Brindlepaw snaked it's way into Burnetpaw's listless thoughts.

She gazed up to the sky and silently pleaded to StarClan that Brindlepaw would return from ThunderClan unscathed. *Loving a medicine cat is against the warrior code, but I must be an exception. StarClan simply made us for each other.* A cat sat down next to Burnetpaw; smelling of warm grass and soft rain. Myrtleleap was the embodiment of grace and hushed words.

"Burnetpaw... I would like to clarify that what Waspsong said was... untrue."

The ginger she-cat turned her attention towards the short-furred feline, now inquisitive. "It's okay if you have a crush on a cat from another Clan, as long as you don't act upon it." She meowed, trying to soothe Myrtleleap, who shook her head.

"You don't understand. I'd never b-break the warrior code. Waspsong had asked me if I thought any cat was attractive. I was a

little startled, so I had given her the first name I could think of, just as he passed us. I don't have a crush on Egretnose. Really, I've never had a crush on anyone. I don't want to, either."

Burnetpaw nodded slowly, absorbing up what Myrtleleap had said. "Why are you telling me this?" Asked she, tilting her ears forward. *How perplexing.*

"I wanted to clear my name. I follow the warrior code, after all. It felt like living a lie for you or Waspsong believing that I've ever had a crush on anyone. I tried to tell Waspsong, but she insisted that I was lying." Myrtleleap finished her statement, composed now that a burden had been lifted from her shoulders.

"Well, I trust you. I don't think I could ever *not* love someone romantically, but if you don't develop romantic feelings for other cats, then you simply don't." Burnetpaw said, smiling hesitantly. Myrtleleap returned the smile, announced her leave, and padded away further into the barn. Burnetpaw became more attentive as she overheard bitter words being exchanged by two RiverClan cats, yet most of the other cats were oblivious.

"I can't believe we have to stay here! It reeks of hay and farm animals. There's a vacant twoleg nest where we could have gone, and it probably provides better shelter!" A calico she-cat complained, tail lashing.

"Streamtooth, you absolute fish-brain!" A grey and white tom snarled, apricot-colored eyes burning. "A twoleg nest? I bet the place is swarming with the wretched creatures! Not to mention, there would be kittypets and dogs. Would you really be willing to live in such conditions?"

"It's better than a barn!" Streamtooth protested, claws digging into the ground. "There are leaks in the roof and it creaks at night!"

Burnetpaw was alarmed. If fights broke out within the two Clans often, it would be detrimental for every cat. Patience was running thin between the Clans. Cats began to turn their heads as voices were raised, the tension growing increasingly tight. Whispers traveled across the barn, others becoming laconic.

"You two ought to stop." Whitefoot, the deputy of WindClan, interjected. "You're distracting everyone." Her tail swished to and fro, the white tip twitching slightly.

"Shut your jaws, rabbit-chaser! There's nothing to be distracted from, anyway." The tom-cat cuffed Whitefoot's ear with one of his big paws. The WindClan cats collectively gasped in reaction to the assault. Whitefoot was shocked, and her claws slid into view. Burnetpaw's pelt bristled. She took a step forward.

"Egretnose!" A voice from the crowd hissed, and the cat pushed past Burnetpaw. Orchidbird's fur rippled, his muscles tightened. "What are you doing?"

"She was interrupting RiverClan business!" Some of the RiverClan cats murmured in agreement, but Orchidbird shook his head.

"It is as much of her business as it is mine. WindClan and RiverClan are living together for now, and every cat will have to get used to that. If you're going to cause so much trouble, possibly you'd like to stay with ShadowClan or ThunderClan."

"Don't act like you're Kestrelstar." Egretnose growled. "The leader's word is law, and you are not a leader. You're an abomination; you like toms." Burnetpaw's breath caught in her throat. *Why did he say that?* She was disgusted, and ready to throw herself at the cat.

Chapter Eleven

"I see, *this* is why you're causing a scene." A large tom growled. "You hate Orchidbird because he loves me. You picked a fight with Streamtooth because she's his sister who supports him. Not every tom that, y'know, likes toms is a kit-abandoning minnowheart."

"Don't..." Egretnose's voice faded. Burnetpaw was confused. Sweetpurr and Vulturehop were murdered. That was hardly equivalent to abandonment, unless RiverClan knew something that the WindClan cats did not.

Even Whitefoot seemed perplexed, but regained her composure. "This is indeed a RiverClan matter." She told WindClan, and most of them tore their gaze from the bickering cats in respect. Burnetpaw had to pull herself away from the drama too, as much as she yearned to intervene. It was none of her business.

Burnetpaw narrowed her dandelion-hued eyes as she heard pawsteps. "Silence! Something is outside of the barn." She hissed, the voices of the cats softening. She nearly attacked Nuthatchface as the medicine cats and leaders entered. They were exhausted.

"Let your fur lay flat, it's only us." Kestrelstar meowed, his voice strained. Some cats shot glares at Burnetpaw for overreacting. She ducked her head, and watched benevolent, doe-like Brindlepaw as the tiny cat made her way over to Cypressdust.

"It seems like we'll be staying here longer than we planned." Sedgestar announced. Cats sighed and spoke words of dismay.

"Thank StarClan you're here." Orchidbird padded over to Kestrelstar, his rumbling voice so low that Burnetpaw had to listen carefully. "Egretnose had a little problem..."

"It's been many moons since their deaths and he's still acting like this." Kestrelstar hissed under his breath, claws kneading at the ground. "There's nothing we can do anymore. If he wants help

getting over his trauma, we can provide it. However, we can't force him to. We'll just have to deal with his attitude towards you."

Burnetpaw was approached by a strong and looming figure. *Sunstreak.* Her throat grew dry, and she knew that Sunstreak had quite a lot of unkind things to say. "What do you want? Spit it out." She hissed.

"How foolish are you to alarm us all like that? How could you not have smelled the familiar scent of Kestrelstar, Sedgestar and the medicine cats? Is your nose broken, or are you just that dumb?" Sunstreak taunted. Burnetpaw opened her jaws to speak, but the tan molly continued. "I shouldn't even be surprised by now. You were born a dunce."

"Why are you always stepping on my tail?" The apprentice shouted, her fur bushing up and claws unsheathing. Burnetpaw's pelt was hot with anger. She couldn't see clearly. Her mind was overwhelmed with dangerous, code-breaking thoughts. "Sunstreak, I hate you! I wish you were dead!" Just as she was about to strike her Clanmate, a quiet voice stopped her.

"Is your name Sunpaw?" An ancient-looking golden tabby with a great resemblance to Sunstreak, aside from her unkempt fur, asked.

"Sedgestar told me I shouldn't talk to strangers." Sunstreak growled, turning her back. *Still taking orders from her father?* Burnetpaw wondered.

"You have your mother's yellow fur and blazing eyes. I haven't seen you since you were an apprentice." The cat was persistent. "Of course, your name isn't Sunpaw anymore. What did that young molly say? Sunstreak?"

"I don't know what you're talking about. Go away, senile mange-pelt!" Sunstreak's voice cracked. Her eyes swam with confusion.

"I was talking to my family. We were observing you. I'm now sure that you're Tansyshine's daughter." Seeing the commotion, Sedgestar approached them. He glared at the old she-cat, his gaze sharp. His stare darkened with a frightening sentiment that

Burnetpaw hadn't seen her leader display ever before.

"Sedgestar, what is she saying? Who's Tansyshine?" Sunstreak meowed, her tone laced with silky honey. Near him, she was sweet.

Before Sedgestar could speak; the unfamiliar feline lunged at him, but Burnetpaw held her back. The RiverClan cat twisted her frail body to smack the apprentice, and Burnetpaw let go. "You selfish fox-heart! Why did you keep her from us? All of this time, your kits have been living a lie!" The she-cat caterwauled.

Four other cats approached; A limping senior cat, Daffodilnest, a younger cat with the same haunting yellow optics as her relative, and a tom the age of Sunstreak. They watched intently in the sidelines, seemingly ready to intervene at any time.

"Kits? I'm your only kit!... Who's my mother? Sedgestar, explain!" Sunstreak raised her voice, and she stood taller. Sedgestar frowned down at her, his eyes shifting as if he was calculating how he could get out of the situation.

"They're lying!" The WindClan leader insisted. He turned to the messy-furred she-cat. "Let's take this outside, Poppymask, before we draw a crowd. We have to keep this situation under control." Burnetpaw knew she should look away, but her thirst to know about the cats who claimed to be Sunstreak's family kept her from averting her eyes.

"No! Let your Clanmates know that you lied about your daughter's kin! I don't want to talk. I want you to acknowledge your mistakes." The senior tabby point said through gritted teeth.

As a crowd gathered, Sedgestar fell silent and looked around. He ducked his head and shoved past the four golden-furred RiverClan cats, clambering up the stacks of hay. His wrathful green eyes were only focused on the elderly she-cat as he addressed the felines. "Cats of WindClan and RiverClan! I have an announcement, courtesy of Poppymask. Sunstreak of WindClan is half-clan, and Yelloweyes of RiverClan is her littermate. The late Tansyshine of RiverClan is their mother."

Cats began to mutter with disgust.

"That can't be true! Tell me it's not true!" Sunstreak shrieked.

The WindClan leader raised his voice above the others, keeping eye contact with Poppymask. "Clans dismissed."

Chapter Twelve

Cats bombarded Sedgestar with questions and insults as he pushed past everyone and left the barn. A group of WindClan cats followed him, but they didn't go outside, for it had started to rain again.

Sunstreak raced after him, but returned moments later with her head bowed and tail drooping. She looked as if she was going to be sick. Her legs buckled from beneath her. Whitefoot helped Sunstreak up and took her to a corner of the barn. It was exceptionally loud, much so that Burnetpaw could not collect her thoughts. She was far too conflicted to make sense of anything.

"I wonder if he'll come back." Foxpaw said to the lanky apprentice.

Burnetpaw staggered backwards in surprise. "I didn't notice that you were standing next to me." The ginger ticked tabby laughed uncomfortably.

"I hope that he returns- he is our leader, after all- but it's obvious that he has a lot to explain. He's certainly not admirable, but he's still redeemable."

Gone was the indestructible, responsible and selfless WindClan leader she knew. Burnetpaw had always believed that Sunstreak was of full WindClan descent, and that Sedgestar's loyalties laid with his Clan. Though, now Burnetpaw realized that there were inconsistencies in Sunstreak's past that could only be explained by her being a half-Clan cat.

"I've never liked Sedgestar." Her sister admitted with a short lash of her tail. Burnetpaw felt that the drama between she and Foxpaw had subsided for now. Even so, She wanted to question her sister; to demand why Foxpaw had abandoned her when she needed her most.

"Oh, I disagree. I've always thought highly of him, especially because I've been under the impression that he's someone that he

has never been. In my opinion, a good cat is loyal to StarClan and follows the code and he-" Burnetpaw mewed, but was interrupted.

"StarClan, Burnetpaw! The warrior code this, the warrior code that! When will you realize that life is more than just a set of rules? Life isn't about our ancestors and how they perceive us; it's about living cats, and how we perceive ourselves!" Foxpaw said, her golden eyes wide with persuasion.

"There you go again, attacking me like you always do! Did you come over here just to start a fight? Maybe you don't follow the code or the will of StarClan as strictly as I do, but you don't have to scorn me because of it!"

"StarClan isn't even real!" Burnetpaw's sibling declared.

The tall she-cat stared at Foxpaw. "Tell Brindlepaw that. She has a strong connection to StarClan."

"Brindlepaw's a terrible medicine cat, and I wouldn't rely on her if I were you."

"Don't say that about her!" Burnetpaw roared. "I think Volepaw is awful. How do you like that?"

"That's hardly comparable! I love Volepaw, and Brindlepaw is just your friend."

"You don't know what love is." She snarled, her fur bristling.

Burnetpaw turned from her sister and skulked further into the crowd of cats, her tail dragging on the ground as she walked. Emberheart invited her to sit next to he and Tallears with a gesture of his tail, but Burnetpaw ignored her father.

Foxpaw is so wrong! May StarClan strike her down for what she said. Burnetpaw thought as she fumed alone beside a rotting wall of the barn, her tail twitching side to side. *How dare she belittle the warrior code, StarClan and her future medicine cat. Foxpaw is surely going to the Dark Forest.*

Her spiteful thoughts were interrupted by a battle cry. She couldn't

believe her eyes as she watched ThunderClan and ShadowClan flood the barn. Their claws shone and teeth were bared. Before she could recover from the shock, a cat that reeked of ThunderClan threw himself at her. She recognized him as Elmlily, a young warrior.

Burnetpaw slashed her claws down Elmlily's flank. He hissed with fury, scoring his sharp claws across her cheek. It stung, and she felt the wound immediately flare up. He pinned her down, digging his fangs into her shoulder.

Burnetpaw yowled as a burning pain shot from her shoulder to her paw. She smelled the sweet and catmint-like scent of her dearest friend beside her and looked over, seeing that Brindlepaw had come to defend her. The tortoiseshell took a step towards the ThunderClan tom, her claws unsheathing.

Brindlepaw was very near her target, but had yet to strike. Burnetpaw noticed that WindClan's medicine cat apprentice was trembling. Brindlepaw hesitated, having not thought this through. The tortoiseshell feebly raised a paw to strike.

"Brindlepaw, what are you doing?" Burnetpaw demanded, alarmed. She couldn't manage to throw Elmlily off.

Time seemed to slow down as the tom-cat spun and, without wavering, raked his claws across Brindlepaw's throat. The blood splattered. Speckles landed on Burnetpaw as she gaped at her injured Clanmate.

The fetching chocolate tortoiseshell collapsed on the ground, choking on her own crimson blood.

Chapter Thirteen

Burnetpaw cried out and, with a burst of adrenaline, shoved the tom-cat off of herself. She pressed up against Brindlepaw. "She needs a medicine cat!" She sobbed, her voice fervent with grief. Burnetpaw buried her face into Brindlepaw's fur.

"You'll be alright, don't worry." She assured her, the ginger she-cat's doubt clear. The cats were too busy saving their own lives to save anyone else.

The feline tried to speak, but only a gurgling sound came out. No one could save her. Burnetpaw could only watch Brindlepaw's suffering. The pain that the ginger apprentice felt was greater than any wound.

Elmlily got up and stood, watching as the russet tabby grieved the impending death. He began to lick the blood off of his claws. Burnetpaw turned on the arrogant tom who had done this to her Brindlepaw.

Her kind, quiet and stunning Brindlepaw. She was vulnerable, and the ThunderClan cat had killed her even so. He must have known Brindlepaw was a medicine cat from the smell that hung off of her, and her lack of defined muscles.

He would pay. She'd raise the Dark Forest. Burnetpaw would rip out his jugular and gut him. In the moment, she'd do anything to get revenge. Just to feel anything other than the sadness that ran through her body, even for a few minutes.

With a screech, the red molly swiftly pinned him down and, in her fury, slashed at him multiple times. The ginger and cream tom yelled in pain. He kicked and raked at her with all of his might until he was still.

She looked down at what she'd done; how she had deeply torn his throat and inflicted gaping, jagged cuts on his belly. Her own hide

was covered in injuries, but she stopped feeling them.

Burnetpaw then glanced back at Brindlepaw. The medicine cat apprentice could hardly speak, but her clouding eyes displayed her disappointment and fear. Burnetpaw wasn't sure if Brindlepaw was scared of her or scared of death. Maybe she was afraid of both.

"What did..." The tortoiseshell wheezed. Her voice broke off as she hacked up blood. "I don't want to go!" She suddenly cried.

The warrior apprentice immediately felt remorse. "I'm sorry that I... You'll be okay..."

Brindlepaw's sides weakened. Abruptly, they stopped moving altogether. Burnetpaw looked from the tortoiseshell's corpse to Elmlily's in a panic.

"I'll fix you and him!" She promised Brindlepaw as she scrambled over to the medicine cat apprentice, whose body was still warm, but it wouldn't last long. "I was protecting you. I couldn't let him harm you even more! Please, *please* don't leave me. I love you. Oh, StarClan! I can't live without you."

Burnetpaw's voice gradually became quieter as she spoke until her vocal chords prevented her from saying another word. She tried to scream, but nothing came out. The feline hid her face in Brindlepaw's lengthy coat as she wept.

Drops of blood stained the barn's floor. Burnetpaw got to her paws, shaking with rage. She raced towards Sunstreak, who was struggling against two opponents. Her paws beat loudly against the aged wood floor as she neared them. Burnetpaw jumped and dug her claws into the back of one of them. She bit her scruff and sliced the cat's ears.

The ThunderClan she-cat flipped in the air and slammed Burnetpaw against the ground. She rolled to stand and quickly began to pummel the apprentice with powerful blows. Burnetpaw shrunk away. The ginger cat got up and deflected the attacks by slamming down the warrior's paws as soon as she tried to hit her.

The ThunderClan molly grunted with frustration and pounced to the side. As Burnetpaw whipped around to face her, the she-cat slapped a paw against the side of the cat's head. The force caused the WindClan apprentice to tumble down.

Burnetpaw had wanted a war to prove her worth. She had always loved the successful feeling of killing prey, or winning in battle training. She thought that a war would be the same. Now that the battle had happened, however, Burnetpaw realized that her desires had been absolutely foolish and naïve. If just a single battle brought this much misery to her, how much would a war bring? She never knew how hopelessly ignorant she had been until her best friend was dead.

She recalled what Brindlepaw had dreamt about three moons ago, and wondered if the dream was truly a vision. *Could we have prevented this battle? Could we have done something different?* She peeked at the ginger body not many foxlengths away. *I've killed someone! I've broken the warrior code! I've become the type of cat I preach against. I'm a monster.*

Her actions disgusted her. She couldn't believe that she'd killed Elmlily, even if he had killed the cat she loved most. It was horrific and surreal. Burnetpaw was a murderer. She was at fault. She was wrong and she couldn't take back her choices.

Everything was *so* wrong. As she fought off her enemy, she only wanted time to stop. The more Burnetpaw mulled over the things that had just occurred, the more she shut out the world, until she completely lost her grip on reality.

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Burnetpaw's ears rang. Sunstreak's blurry form nudged the apprentice. The golden she-cat was yelling incomprehensible words. Burnetpaw didn't remember laying down, but she was splayed out on the ground. She must have blacked out. A panting ShadowClan cat was behind the two, their muzzle covered in blood. And Burnetpaw was bleeding. So much. Or was it another cat's blood?

Everything came back to her like a monster tearing through her

body, leaving her mangled organs and fur out on Thunderpath for birds of prey. Elmlily killed Brindlepaw. Burnetpaw killed Elmlily.

Brindlepaw was gone. *Forever*.

Sunstreak urged Burnetpaw to stand up as she fought off the ShadowClan cat, but Burnetpaw couldn't seem to move. She wanted to be dead, like Brindlepaw. There was no reason to try anymore. Not without her.

The muscular she-cat grabbed Burnetpaw by the scruff and pulled her up. "Get yourself together!" Sunstreak hissed. The ginger she-cat could smell the fear-scent wafting off of the warrior. The atmosphere got sharper.

The ShadowClan cat threw themselves at Burnetpaw. Sunstreak clumsily tackled the ShadowClan cat and slashed her claws across their muzzle. Another cat suddenly pinned down Burnetpaw. She scratched at the she-cat's belly in vain, as the cat dug her claws into Burnetpaw's throat. *Is their intention to kill? ShadowClan and ThunderClan are showing no mercy!* Her vison grew fuzzy.

Burnetpaw, who had always been determined to survive the perils of a warrior's life, wanted to surrender.

The weight lifted off of her and she took a gasping breath of air, looking over to see Sunstreak battling the ShadowClan she-cat.

"Why'd you help me?" Burnetpaw asked Sunstreak feebly, in a stupor.

"For the same reason you helped me." The golden tabby responded through gritted teeth as she tussled with the enemy. "When we're in danger, we're Clanmates before anything else."

Chapter Fourteen

Burnetpaw realized Sunstreak was only a loyal cat trying her best to do what she believed to be right, against the many tests of willpower that the world thrust upon her. The fighting lulled. Although the cats in the barn were outnumbered, they had great strength.

"ShadowClan retreat!" Salamanderstar screeched. The she-cat that Sunstreak was fighting with slipped away, limping out of the barn alongside her Clanmates while some RiverClan and WindClan cats chased after them.

"Cowards!" The black and white ThunderClan leader yelled, her fur streaked scarlet with blood.

Eveningstar was smart enough to know that if she stayed, her Clan would be beaten. She grudgingly called for ThunderClan to also retreat, and all of the cats ceased their combat after a minute. The forest-dwelling Clan left the Horseplace shamefully.

Sunstreak could be up to no good. A little while ago I told her I wanted her dead. Why would she save my coat? "Burnetpaw, you're a WindClan cat. I couldn't have let you die." Sunstreak finally said after she had lapped at her wounds, as if she had read Burnetpaw's thoughts.

"So... We're still enemies?" Burnetpaw inquired, scraping the concrete floor of the barn with her claws.

"How you were fighting took a great amount bravery." The sandy tabby replied, ignoring her companion's question.

Burnetpaw sighed, her mind overflowing with gloomy thoughts. She decided not to tell anyone about Elmlily. If a cat asked, Burnetpaw would lie. The tall apprentice watched as WindClan and RiverClan cats moved four dead cats to a corner of the barn while the wounded were being treated.

Sunstreak sat down beside the russet apprentice. "Honestly, I haven't acted like a responsible mentor. I can't say that I want to be friends with you, because that would be a lie, but I don't want us to hate each other anymore, as we have for so long."

Burnetpaw was baffled. *Is she serious?* She didn't see a shred of deceit on the golden tabby's features. Burnetpaw was prepared to berate the young warrior. She had a thousand words that she wanted to say, and none of them were the least bit kind. Then the image of Brindlepaw's disappointed, misty amber optics flashed in her mind. "I think... that's a good idea." She forced herself to say.

Before Sunstreak could reply, Burnetpaw heard Kestrelstar's booming voice. "Cats of RiverClan and WindClan. We have lost lives today, but—"

"I'm sick of this! I have an announcement." A RiverClan tom growled loudly from the crowd. *Egretnose*; the troublemaker.

"You don't have the authority to make an announcement." Someone scoffed.

"As I was saying-" Kestrelstar attempted to continue.

"WindClan, your leader is not the cat you think he is." Burnetpaw frowned, wondering what Egretnose was talking about. *What else could Sedgestar be hiding?*

"Sweetpurr was close friends with Sunstreak's kin." He looked over at the quartet of RiverClan cats; Poppymask, Daffodilfeather, Lizardbrook and Yelloweyes. They confirmed what he said with a nod of their head or a chime of agreement.

"He suspected that Sunstreak was being sheltered from her origins and he wanted to change that. Later, Sweetpurr and Vulturehop were found dead near WindClan territory soon after they left RiverClan without telling anyone why. Doesn't that sound suspicious?"

"You're a liar, Egretnose!" Sunstreak accused.

The crowd began to speak, but the dark grey and white tom

silenced them. "I reckon Sedgestar killed them. He wanted to keep Sunstreak just so he could command her like he does with everyone else. I'll bet he stopped her from going to gatherings in case a cat told her about her heritage."

"How dare you!" Whitefoot hissed.

"Even I think this is ridiculous." Kestrelstar meowed sternly. "Stop this nonsense immediately."

"I don't know what to believe..." Featherpool muttered to Nightfern, loud enough for Burnetpaw to hear.

"We grew up with him." The dark-toned tom whispered. "We would've known, right?"

Sedgestar's authority over WindClan was slipping as his Clanmates began to believe what Egretnose was claiming. He scowled at Egretnose, his claws digging into the scattered hay that he stood upon. "You know nothing about me nor my daughter!" Sedgestar spat.

"Yes, I do. I know that you manipulated my fathers to keep quiet about how you've left Sunstreak in the shadows. They thought she deserved to know who her family really was, and she did. Sweetpurr was going to expose you for the code-breaking cat that you are, so you had to get rid of him."

"You and Redclaw had an argument the day of the flood. You two were best friends, but she was livid." Burnetpaw was surprised to hear her father speak. "Be honest, Sedgestar, did you kill her? She had a huge head wound and scratches were on her body, too."

Sedgestar's eyes widened and he dug his claws further into the straw. "Enough! I will not be treated like a criminal. We all need to calm down... our feelings are out of control and cats are making preposterous declarations."

"You had kits with a RiverClan cat and managed to keep everyone quiet about it until now. If you already broke the code, you could've done it again. And again. Yeah? I was there when you killed

Sweetpurr and Vulturehop. I was hiding, waiting to ask them to return to RiverClan."

She didn't know if Egretnose was being dishonest, but his concluding sentence sent her leader reeling. Sedgestar began to pace, his long light brown tail lashing wildly.

"...Yes, I killed them. I didn't enjoy it, but I had to. They were getting in my way! They wanted to take away my power." Sedgestar yowled, eyes crazed. The news was jarring. Burnetpaw was irate.

Sedgestar had slain three cats, one of which was his Clanmate. The WindClan cat stole the chance of having a somewhat normal life from Sunstreak when he decided that his reputation was more important than telling her the truth.

Chapter Fifteen

"You foxheart! How dare you!" Poppymask screamed, her voice gritty with despair. She did not appear to be surprised. Still, she was angry and sad once her suspicions had been confirmed.

Burnetpaw found herself staring at Foxpaw's mentor. Sunstreak was completely dejected. Burnetpaw had never seen the golden tabby like this. The yellow-eyed apprentice could not bear to see her Clanmate so full of sadness. She looked away.

"Sedgestar!" Nuthatchface yelled from where she was standing. "You are exiled from WindClan."

"No, you can't do that!" The pale brown tabby yelled. "I was protecting Sunstreak!"

"From what? The real world? *Your* dumb mistakes?" Poppymask intervened, her cheeks stained with tears. "The truth is, you're using that as an excuse so you can sleep at night. You were protecting yourself. In the end, you killed three cats who were loved."

Let's kill him. Burnetpaw found herself nearly suggesting. Initially, she was alarmed by the unwelcomed dark thought. However, it didn't seem like a terrible idea. *An eye for an eye. Sedgestar's death is long overdue.* The gangly feline figured.

"Enough. Leave." Nuthatchface jeered as her claws slid out.

Sedgestar walked out of the barn slowly with his tail between his legs and back arched. Cats spit at him, and Furzegaze had the gall to strike the exiled leader's flank. Burnetpaw waited a few heartbeats to stand and follow him, her claws unsheathed. *I might as well do it. I've already crossed the line.*

She trailed after him quietly, making sure to remain hidden in the tall grass. Burnetpaw paused. *Why am I really doing this?* She wondered. *What has he ever done to me? Am I genuinely upset over*

him killing Redclaw? It didn't matter. Sedgestar was a sinner. Burnetpaw was a hypocrite, and she was well aware of it. The fact that she had broken the warrior code did not make her despise code-breaking cats any less.

"*Burnetpaw, don't.*" She looked around for the cat who spoke. "*You're much better than this*." Burnetpaw's fur raised. The voice was mellow and hauntingly familiar. It belonged to Brindlepaw. The feline crumpled to the ground and wailed.

Sedgestar spun around to face the apprentice. "Why are you following me?" He questioned. Sedgestar's green eyes were gentle yet guarded, like WindClan's leader, not WindClan's outcast. She knew that he was unpredictable. The long-furred cat would eliminate anyone if he thought they were dangerous.

Burnetpaw scrambled up and took a few strides away from him, but Sedgestar lurched ahead and grasped her scruff.

"I've killed before! I'll kill again!" Burnetpaw warned the exiled cat with not much enthusiasm as she wriggled from his grasp.

"*What?*" Sedgestar hissed, his paws frozen to the ground.

Without answering, she turned and dashed away back to the barn. A few foxlengths from the entrance, Burnetpaw slowed her pace and strolled in casually. The she-cat was still on edge from having heard Brindlepaw's voice. *She must be mad at me. I hate that I made her angry*.

The apprentice wondered if Brindlepaw would contact her again. Perhaps the tortoiseshell's death was not the end of their relationship, but the idea was insane. Brindlepaw's goal had been to heal and save cats. Burnetpaw had done exactly the opposite.

"Where were you?" Foxpaw asked, approaching the ginger she-cat.

Burnetpaw averted her gaze, trying to conjure up an excuse. "I had to go on a walk. To clear my mind."

"Burnetpaw, I have to tell you something. It's very important."

"What is it?" Burnetpaw inquired, not too interested in what her sister had to say.

"I'm expecting Volepaw's kits. Nuthatchface told me a few days ago."

Burnetpaw couldn't believe what Foxpaw had just said. She scrunched her nose. "Huh?"

"You heard me."

"You're only an apprentice!" She yelled.

"We'll be warriors in no time. Once everything is normal again, we'll have our warrior names and Volepaw and I will become mates." Foxpaw mewed cheerfully.

"Volepaw's no good for you! Being a mother at such a young age isn't good for you!" Burnetpaw protested. "Have you told Tallears? Or Emberheart?"

"No. You and I have our differences, but I wanted you to know first. I'm happy. I thought you'd be happy."

"I'm not- I'm not happy at all." Burnetpaw hissed. She advanced past Foxpaw, deeper into the crowd of RiverClan and WindClan cats.

Epilogue

Burnetcrash padded into the nursery, a plump mouse hanging from her jaws. She dropped it at Cherrykit's paws.

His green eyes widened with joy. The tom-kit pulled it closer to himself. "Thank you, Burnetcrash!" He purred, tearing off a mouthful.

"I just don't want you to die of starvation or something... I-It would be bad for the Clan." The ginger she-cat frowned, but her gaze glimmered with affection as she watched her nephew eat. She noted with amusement that his coat was dusty and wild.

"As if I starve him." Foxglade snickered, standing from her nest and nuzzling the reddish-brown tabby kit. "You better hurry up with that mouse, your apprentice ceremony will be any moment now."

With Foxglade's remark, Cherrykit scarfed down his meal. "Foxglade, will you groom my fur?" He queried, pressing against his mother.

Burnetcrash watched Volestrike linger by the nursery entrance for a few seconds. She glowered at him, fangs slightly bared, and he hurried away. The tom had rejected Foxglade when she told him that she was expecting his offspring. He hadn't been involved when Cherrykit was born, and Burnetcrash knew that Foxglade wanted it to stay that way. Cherrykit didn't deserve to be hurt like she had.

"May all cats old enough to run the moors gather beneath Tallrock." Burnetcrash's big ears pricked as she heard Whitestar's call.

"My fur isn't perfect yet!" Cherrykit worried.

"If you hadn't rolled in the dirt earlier, it would be." Foxglade retorted. She ran her tongue along his fur hastily.

Cherrykit swayed impatiently. "Am I good? I'm going to miss my

own apprentice ceremony!"

"Whitestar won't name you an apprentice if you're not present, bees-for-brains." Burnetcrash snickered.

"You're free." The ginger queen told her kit with a giggle. He darted out of the den.

Burnetcrash avoided looking at the medicine cat's den as she trailed after her nephew. She often had nightmares about her last moon as an apprentice. The scent of herbs left her wobbling, and she couldn't relive the sight of Brindlepaw's bloodied fur or Emberlily's sliced body without having to lay down.

Burnetcrash had been too young and unstable for the drama that had ensued, the things that she had found out, and the fury that she had harbored. Burnetcrash always wanted a second chance. She knew that many of the cats in the Clans felt the same. But no one could change the past, and she had almost come to terms with that.

WindClan had secrets. She had secrets, too. The ginger warrior would never tell anyone the truth about what had happened that fateful day in the barn, nor of she and Brindlepaw's romance. Burnetcrash had learned that some things were better left unknown.

"There you are, Cherrykit." The white-pawed leader purred from Tallrock.
Burnetcrash seated herself next to Crowstorm and Sunstreak. Their tails were twined together. The two had recently become mates. She did not particularly approve, but Sunstreak was much nicer to her than she had been when Burnetcrash was an apprentice.

She watched intently as Whitestar began the ceremony. "Cherrykit, step forward." The feline's green gaze wavered as she glanced at Nuthatchface. They exchanged a nod. "Nuthatchface is in need of a new apprentice. Cherrykit has shown interest in becoming a medicine cat and, after consulting StarClan, Nuthatchface has decided to take on Cherrykit as her apprentice. I trust that she has made the right decision, and that he will heal our Clan for many moons. Cherrykit, until you receive your name as a medicine cat, you will be called Cherrypaw."

Burnetcrash's heart thumped against her rib cage. She would protect Cherrypaw no matter what. The premature death of the previous medicine cat apprentice would not be repeated. She would make sure of it.

"Cherrypaw! Cherrypaw!" Her Clanmates cheered.

The heavy scent of herbs swept by Burnetcrash. She tried to prevent her fur from prickling, squeezing her eyes shut for a moment.

"Cherrypaw!" Burnetcrash yowled, her voice devoid of much joy and, oddly, not sounding like herself.

She tried to rationalize that her fear for her kin was unnecessary. Brindlepaw should have never been among the action. She should have never tried to help Burnetpaw. It had been an improbable occurrence, which would likely not happen ever again. He would be in much more danger if he were a warrior apprentice, Burnetcrash knew.

Still, she would never stop associating Brindlepaw with the rank of a medicine cat. After all, she had been training to be one. From the time that she herself had become an apprentice, to Burnetcrash's last whiff of the tortoiseshell before death overtook her, herbs had defined Brindlepaw.

She had not been what most felines would call an excellent medicine cat apprentice. However, Burnetcrash thought that Brindlepaw was the best medicine cat apprentice in the history of the Clans. Being a medicine cat had been her passion, and, moons before, Burnetcrash had grown fond of the smell of herbs that she had once despised, only because Brindlepaw had worked with herbs so often.

It would be hard to get used to Cherrypaw replacing Brindlepaw as the future medicine cat of WindClan. Although, the ginger tabby knew that this wasn't about her. She had learned that she wasn't the only cat with feelings and dreams.

'Good' and 'bad' were not definite terms. Most cats' morals were in a grey area, even her own. Burnetcrash would try to be good, for

Brindlepaw's sake, and for the future of Cherrypaw. She would be the best she could, for the next generations of WindClan.

The End

This story holds a special place in my heart. Burnetcrash was the first major Warrior Cats oc that I was actually proud of, and a few years later I still adore her.

I love the feedback that I've been getting! It makes me so happy to know that people enjoy my story. This story isn't popular by any means, but I'm glad that I'm entertaining even a couple of people.

I've no plans to make another book for Burnetcrash's universe, but I've planned out the past and future of my version of the original Clans a lot (with the help of the Erins having created wc in the first place). I suppose it's kind of like an au?? A lot of things from the real books aren't canon in Burnetcrash's world.

Honestly I love building upon this world so who knows, but right now I think that *Tempest* is the only book following this au-that's-not-quite-an-au.

Anyway, right now I'm going to be revising *Tempest,* but I'm not going to make any major changes. Feel free to give me constructive criticism. I especially would appreciate it if you were to point out anything that made you go "huh???" or "this is rushed..", because I want every plot point to make sense. I don't want this book to be crappy or confusing.

Thank you for reading my book! It means a lot to me.

-Mari